

The ART

of

TRENDS

FORECASTING

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## Why Trend Forecasting Matters More Now Than Ever

In our hyper-online generation, we're constantly surrounded by new micro-trends that pressure us to make fresh purchases every week. I've fallen victim to this myself, so have my friends and family, feeling like we need to buy something new to keep up, fit in, or simply because we believe it will improve our lives.

As an M.S. Marketing candidate at the University of Arizona, I've always been drawn to trend forecasting, especially within fashion. Over time, this fascination expanded beyond clothing and into ecommerce behavior, consumer insights, and the psychology behind why people shop the way they do. My background in fashion merchandising gave me firsthand experience in assortment planning, product presentation, and trend-driven decision-making, skills that shaped the way I understand patterns in the market.

My goal with this eBook is to help students, aspiring merchandisers, and early-career professionals see forecasting as a practical, strategic skill they can use in their everyday work. Here, you'll learn how to observe trends, interpret the right signals, and apply insights, no matter your background or "creative" ability. If you're curious and willing to practice, you can absolutely become a strong trend forecaster.

## The Foundations of Trend Forecasting

Before diving deeper, let's start with the basics.

Trend forecasting relies on four core principles:

### 1. Cultural Signals (Top-Down)

- Movies & TV
- Music, art, and design
- Celebrity influence
- Social values
- Subcultures
  - These represent the *why* behind consumer shifts.

### 2. Consumer Behavior (Bottom-Up)

- Street style
- How people dress on social media (IG/TikTok)
- Lifestyle shifts (wellness, quiet luxury, nostalgia)
  - These show what's emerging in real time.

## 3. Retail & Market Behavior

- Sell-through rates
- Search volume
- Inventory behavior
- Ratings & reviews
  - These help validate whether a trend is real.

## 4. Industry Sources & Experts

- WGSN
- Pinterest Predicts
- Runway reports
- Trend agencies
  - These resources provide early signals and context.

Trend forecasting isn't guessing the "next big thing." It's a blend of data, psychology, cultural analysis, and pattern recognition. You're essentially learning how to read the world more clearly.

## Understanding the Levels of Trends

One of the most important concepts in forecasting is recognizing that not all trends exist on the same level.

### Macro Trends

Macro trends are long-term social, economic, and technological shifts that influence consumer behavior for years. They evolve slowly and affect every industry.

Timeline: 3-10+ years

Examples:

- Wellness and holistic health
- Minimalism
- Sustainability and conscious consumption

Macro trends reveal the deep emotional drivers behind consumer preferences. They shape brand positioning and guide long-term strategy.

### Micro Trends

Micro trends are short-term aesthetic or behavioral shifts that rise quickly and fade just as fast.

Timeline: 3 months-2 years

Examples:

- Coastal Cowgirl
- Coquette
- "Clean Girl"

Micro trends influence seasonal assortments and social media-driven content. To stay relevant, brands must track these shifts closely.

## Retail Trends

Retail trends are product-specific changes shaped by macro and micro trends. They tell us what consumers are actually buying.

Examples:

- Specific silhouettes (e.g., barrel jeans)
- Trending colors
- Material or style preferences

Together, these three types of trends paint a full picture:

- Macro = why consumers behave this way
- Micro = how that “why” shows up aesthetically
- Retail = what they purchase as a result

Forecasting helps businesses reduce risk and make smarter inventory decisions. When merchandisers align product storytelling with what consumers want emotionally and visually, they gain a strategic advantage.

## The Trend Forecasting Process: A Step-by-Step Blueprint

Here’s the process I personally follow, and one you can easily apply to your daily life or future career.

### Step 1: Observation

Pinterest and TikTok are your best friends here. Create seasonal mood boards to track colors, silhouettes, and themes. Not just for inspiration, but to stay aware of what’s circulating online.

As a marketing student, staying informed on social media trends is essential. Fashion, lifestyle, and product trends offer clues about what’s working now and what may succeed next.

### Step 2: Collection & Categorization

When curating Pinterest boards or scrolling on social media, save content that repeats similar colors, shapes, and vibes. Patterns create clarity.

Also pay attention to:

- Repeated aesthetics
- Recurring keywords
- Items multiple influencers post at once

One rule I’ve learned personally:

*If something becomes popular extremely fast, there’s a good chance it will become oversaturated just as quickly.*

Identifying these details helps you understand the broader product trend cycle.

### Step 3: Interpretation

This is where forecasting becomes powerful.

Trends make sense only when we combine what people feel with how they shop.

Emotions explain the trend.

Data confirms the trend.

To understand the emotional driver behind a trend, ask:

- What emotional need does it fulfill?
- Which cultural forces are fueling it?
- Are there barriers or resistances?

These help you distinguish between macro and micro trends, and predict longevity.

Retail math validates the behavior.

Key metrics include:

- Sell-Through Rate (STR): How quickly an item sells relative to available inventory
- Conversion Rate: How many site visitors turn into buyers
- Search Data: Google Trends, Pinterest searches, retailer search bars

If a search term sustains growth for 2–3 weeks, it’s usually a stable pattern rather than a moment.

### Step 4: Application

Once you understand the trend, translate the insight into action:

- Assortment planning
- Storytelling & messaging
- Visual merchandising
- Ecommerce recommendations

This is where forecasting meets real business decisions.

### Step 5: Validation & Adjustment

Ask yourself: How do we know when a trend is real?

Look for:

- Rising search interest
- High sell-through early in the season
- Strong conversion rates
- Organic adoption
- Reorders and expanded assortments
- Emotional alignment with consumer psychology

When these signals align, the trend is ready to hit the market.

## How to Build Your Trend Forecasting Muscle

Trend Forecasting isn't a skill that just magically appears overnight. It takes conscious effort and daily commitment to see the trends evolve.

Here are some fun activities you can do to help you develop the skill:

- Practice daily observation
  - Create a goal to follow 5-10 consistent sources (WGSN, TikTok Creators, Pinterest Boards)
- Build a trend journal
  - Color palettes, screenshots, retail visits
- Develop your aesthetic literacy
  - Learn how to identify recurring designs (materials, silhouettes)
- Continuously work on your cultural awareness
  - Track different shifts in film, music, politics, influencers
- Start small
  - Personal projects, internships, or on TikTok

Most importantly, practice forecasting in your own personal life and then evaluate how those adaptations influence your forecasting power.

## Your Next Step as a Trend Forecaster

Trend forecasting is a creative and strategic skill anyone can learn. As someone with both merchandising and marketing experience, I've found that forecasting strengthens decision-making, storytelling, and career growth.

Start simply. Observe the people around you. Pay attention to what you see repeatedly online. Save what you love, what you dislike, and what you can't escape. These everyday observations are the beginning of understanding cultural signals and shaping your own point of view.

If you're curious, observant, and willing to connect the dots, you can absolutely build the foundation of a strong trend forecasting mindset. I believe you can create this path for yourself, and I'm excited for you to begin.

For more visual learning examples, attached to the right is a fun trend forecasting board I created for the Fall 2026 season (all photo rights belong to Pinterest & their reserved owners).

